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ABSTRACT

The influence of selected discrete emotions on socialization-related learning and perception of workplace adaptation was examined in an exploratory study. Data were collected from 233 service workers in 4 small and medium-sized companies in metropolitan Washington, D.C. The sample members' average age was 32.5 years, and the sample's racial makeup reflected that of the surrounding community. The Workplace Adaptation Questionnaire was used to measure perception of workplace adaptation, and the State-Trait Personality Inventory was used to measure curiosity, anxiety, and anger. Basic demographic data (age, gender, and race) were also collected. The study substantiated the hypothesis that emotions contribute meaningfully to socialization-related learning processes and perception of workplace adaptation. Gender, job satisfaction, anger, and curiosity all proved to be positive, independent predictors of socialization-related learning and workplace adaptation. Anxiety was an independent, negative predictor. Age, race, formal orientation, employee status, and rapidly changing workplace were not significant predictors. Job satisfaction was concluded to be not only an outcome of the socialization process but also a significant factor in the socialization process itself. The study results suggested that models of socialization-related learning and workplace adaptation are useful for discerning the relevance of selected demographic, background, emotion, and learning motivation variables in the socialization process and workplace adaptation. (Contains 29 references.) (MN)

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The Emotions of Socialization-Related Learning: Understanding Workplace Adaptation as a Learning Process

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Scholars are increasingly viewing learning as a key determinant of successful employee socialization or adaptation (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Taormina & Bauer, 2000). Socialization is as an informal learning process during which the requisite skills and knowledge for one's job are proactively acquired. This process is motivated by the need to resolve job-related uncertainties and accomplished through curiosity-induced, information-seeking behaviors such as asking questions, observing and consulting with others, and thinking (Reio & Wiswell, 2000).

Emotions and Organizational Socialization

The past ten years have seen an upsurge in research on emotion that reflect a new awareness of the central role of emotion in our daily lives (Buck, 1999). A promising area of emotional research concerns the role and influence of discrete emotions in the learning the ropes of one's job and thereby successfully adapting to an organization.

Curiosity. Researchers have been interested increasingly in curiosity as both an emotion (Frijda, 1986; Buck, 1999) and a motivator of classroom learning (Loewenstein, 1994; Zuckerman, Chudinova and Khavkin, 1998).

Acknowledging curiosity in learning contexts has considerable promise for motivating learning in children's classrooms, especially as it relates to reading (Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker, 2000), science (Zuckerman, Chudinova, and Khavkin, 1998), and much more. Yet, little research exists exploring its relevance in adult learning contexts, particularly in the workplace.

Anxiety. Anxiety has been shown to interfere with curiosity motivation, learning satisfaction, and depth and breadth of classroom learning (Spielberger & Starr, 1994), test performance (Tobias, 1985), effort expended on computer tasks (Rozell & Gardner, 2000), and self-efficacy as it relates to academic performance (Bandura, 1997).

Anxiety is an important variable in the workplace in that the employee socialization process by its very nature is often anxiety-provoking, frustrating, and stressful. Workers must proactively seek information to reduce these high levels of uncertainty (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993). To this date, however, surprisingly little empirical research has been conducted to explore anxiety's role in the socialization process.

Anger. Anger likewise has been linked to causal attributions of academic failure through learner perceptions of low ability and lack of effort (Weiner & Graham, 1989), poor judgment of stimuli in social situations (Rusting and Jones, 2000), and poor social functioning and peer rejection in pre-school and K-12 contexts (Lemerise & Dodge, 2000). With respect to workplace socialization, moderate-to-high levels of anger have been shown to impede learning, decision making, interpersonal relations, and performance, especially in stressful environments (Caffray & Schneider, 2000; Fitness, 2000). Again, no research has yet explored how anger affects the socialization process.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is yet another emotional state that influences workplace adaptation. According to Cote (1999), job satisfaction has often served as a proxy for affect (e.g., an attitude) in organizational research predicting job performance. Yet, the research findings have often been contradictory. Indeed, further investigation is needed to clarify the strength and direction of these relationships.

Purpose of the Study and Research Hypotheses

This is an exploratory study designed to investigate the influence of selected discrete emotions on socialization-related learning and perception of workplace adaptation. Relevant demographic (age, race, and gender) and background data (status, job satisfaction, exposure to a formal orientation program, and working in a rapidly changing work environment) (Saks and Ashforth, 1997) were collected to control for possible spurious relationships among the variables of interest in this study.

Method

Participants

This study is part of a larger effort exploring how adult curiosity and socialization-related learning influence technical and interpersonal job performance (Reio & Wiswell, 2000). Data were collected from 233 service workers in four small- and medium-sized companies in metropolitan Washington, D.C. The mean age of the participants was 32.5 years (SD = 8.8); 35% were female. Reflecting the basic demographic makeup of the surrounding community, 86% of the total sample was Caucasian, 9% African-American, 3 % Hispanic, and 1% Asian.

Research Measures

Socialization-Related Learning Measures. Perception of workplace adaptation (operationalized as a form of informal learning, i.e., socialized-related learning) was measured by the Workplace Adaptation Questionnaire (WAQ; Copeland, 1993). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item (22 overall) on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (1-5). The four subscales were as follows: job knowledge (level of perceived task mastery), acculturation (perception of having learned the norms, values, and culture of the organization), establishing relationships (being able to identify coworkers with useful information), and satisfaction with learning experiences with 8, 5, 5, and 4 items, respectively. Internal reliabilities ranged from .80 - .96 for the four subscales.

Emotion Measures. The larger overall study used four measures to explore curiosity (see Reio & Wiswell, 2000), including the State-Trait Personality Inventory (STPI; Spielberger & others, 1980), which examines not only curiosity, but two other emotions, anxiety and anger. The curiosity, anxiety, and anger state and trait scales each consisted of ten items. The state measures ask respondents on a Likert scale of 1-4 (1 = not at all to 4 = very much so), how they feel at a particular moment, while the trait measures ask respondents to report how they feel about the question in general. Only the state emotional variables were examined for the current research. Internal consistencies for the three emotion measures ranged from .77-.79.

Demographic, Background, and Selected Contextual Variables. A survey was used to query the participants about important demographic variables identified in the socialization literature: age, gender, and race (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). As further

recommended by Saks and Ashforth, additional background information was collected (via single questions) regarding entry-to-job status, formal orientation program participation, and global job satisfaction. One additional possible confound, the rate of organizational change, was identified and assessed via one question, "I work in a rapidly changing workplace."

Procedure. Before actual involvement, all prospective participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study and how their anonymity would be assured.

Results

Relations Among Research Variables

Table 1 represents the means and standard deviations for each of the research variables associated with this study. Table 2 shows zero-order correlations among the four background variables (restate them here), anxiety, anger, curiosity, and the dependent variable, workplace adaptation. The perception that one works in a rapidly changing workplace was significantly and positively related to attending a formal training orientation, anxiety, and anger, providing evidence that working a rapidly changing workplace can have negative emotional consequences, despite participation in formal orientation activities. Attending formal employee training was related positively and significantly to both employee status and anger, such that lower status employees (new employees) were of course more likely to attend formal orientation-related training; yet, there is some evidence suggesting that there was some level of frustration with orientation procedures. Job satisfaction was correlated significantly and positively with curiosity and socialization-related learning, logically indicating that job satisfaction might promote

worker curiosity. Employee status was related negatively and significantly to anger and anxiety, demonstrating that newer employees were more likely to exhibit negative emotions. Finally, anxiety and anger were highly and positively related, signifying some degree of conceptual overlap between the two constructs.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Research Variables

Research Variable	M	SD
Changing Workplace	1.28	.45
Training Orientation	1.62	.49
Job Satisfaction	2.06	.94
Status	1.18	.61
Anxiety	17.71	5.48
Anger	13.80	6.59
Curiosity	27.42	5.07
Socialization-Related Learning (Adaptation)	73.52	8.56

Note. N = 233.

Table 2. Zero-Order Correlations Among Research Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Changing Workplace	_							
2. Training Orientation	15*	_						
3. Job Satisfaction	10	05	_					
4. Status	**06**	18*	04	_				
5. Anxiety	15*	12	**01**	**16***	_			
6. Anger	16*	17*	**09**	**24****	67***	_		
7. Curiosity	06	04	15*	00	**13**	01	_	
8. Socialization-Related Learning (Adaptation)	02	01	25**	10	**08**	10	27**	_

Note. N = 233. * = p < .05. ** = p < .01. *** = p < .001 Bold-faced numbers are negative. Decimal points were excluded.

Predictors of Socialization-Related Learning and Workplace Adaptation

A hierarchical regression was conducted to determine the unique variance in socialization-related learning (which culminates in perceptions of workplace adaptation)

explained by the demographic, background, emotion, and curiosity variables. As is demanded by a hierarchical analytic approach, the order for all variables in this analysis was directed by the literature (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The demographic variables were entered as a block during the first step, where they independently predicted a significant portion of the variance in socialization-related learning. However, only gender predicted the dependent variable significantly and independently. When entered as a block during the second step, the background variables explained a significant increment of R^2. Once again, however, only one of the variables (job satisfaction) was significantly predicted socialization-related learning independently. The third step consisted of entering the discrete negative emotions as a block, with a significant increment to R^2. Each variable independently predicted socialization-related significantly, yet in opposite directions. Anxiety was independent negative predictor of the dependent variable, while anger was a positive independent predictor. This indicates that the two negative emotions, while highly correlated in this study (r = .67), are rather unique constructs with differential properties. Curiosity was entered during the fourth step, and incrementally explained a significant amount of the variance as well. Last, interaction terms were entered as the final step and did not explain significant variance in the dependent variable. The results of the hierarchical regression demonstrated that demographic, background, emotion, and curiosity variables were independent predictors of perceived workplace adaptation.

Table 3. Predictors of Perception of Workplace Adaptation: Results of Hierarchical Regression

Variable	Beta	ΔR^2
Step 1:		
Demographics		
Age	.08	
Race	.05	
Gender	4.03***	
		.088***
Step 2:		
Background		
Rapid Change	.05	
Orientation	.04	
Satisfaction	.23***	
Status	.09	
		.057**
Step 3:		
Emotions		
Anxiety	-.31***	
Anger	.32***	
		.064***
Step 4:		
Learning Motivation		
Curiosity	.20**	
		.037**
Step 5:		
Interactions		
Curiosity x gender	-.21	
Anxiety x gender	.07	
Anger x gender	.12	
Satisfaction x gender	.22	
		.015
Total		.261***

Note. Standardized beta weights are shown. * = $p < .05$. ** = $p < .01$. *** = $p < .001$

Discussion

The results of this study provide enlightening new information regarding the relations of emotions, curiosity motivation, demographic (age, race, and gender), and

contextual variables (rapidly changing environment, orientation, status, and job satisfaction) to socialization-related learning and workplace adaptation. Gender, job satisfaction, anger, and curiosity were all were positive, independent predictors of socialization-related learning and workplace adaptation. Conversely, anxiety was an independent, negative predictor. Importantly, other significant variables previously identified in the literature did not predict a significant portion of the variance in the dependent variable, i.e., age, race, formal orientation, and employee status. In addition, a new variable, rapidly changing workplace, was not found to be a significant predictor.

These results suggest that models of socialization-related learning and workplace adaptation are useful for discerning the relevance of certain demographic, background, emotion, and learning motivation variables in the socialization process and workplace adaptation. Furthermore, they indicate several new directions for additional research in this area.

Relationships between specific discrete emotions and behavioral outcomes need to be explored. Clearly, emotions should be related to organizational citizenship and extra-role behaviors, and absenteeism, yet this possibility has not been sufficiently investigated (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). In addition, emotions may be related to job turnover, job involvement, and organizational identification, but little information exists concerning these possibilities.

An extremely interesting outcome of this study was that anger positively and incrementally predicted workplace adaptation. This finding was unexpected because moderate to high levels of anger had been shown to impede learning, decision making, and performance (Caffray & Schneider, 2000). Perhaps employee anger served to

motivate clearer thinking, increased effort and persistence on tasks, and attempts to better previous performance (i.e., self-regulation; Kanfer and Heggestad, 1999).

Another relevant finding was that job satisfaction positively and incrementally predicted workplace adaptation. These research findings support the view that job satisfaction is not only an outcome of the socialization process as the bulk of the literature suggests, but it is also a significant factor in the socialization process itself.

Curiosity was also a key predictor of workplace adaptation. Curiosity's role in this model of adaptation was unique. By statistically controlling for important confounding demographic, background, and emotional variables, curiosity, an important motivator of learning was found to independently predict workplace adaptation.

Overall, these research findings shed considerable light on the vital role and influence of emotions in workplace learning contexts. Essentially, objective information obtained from this study substantiated the view that emotions contribute meaningfully to socialization-related learning processes and perception of workplace adaptation.

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